

LOWER KERN RIVER WHITEWATER RUN

Sequoia National Forest Kern River Ranger District



Welcome to the Kern River! With a gradient of 30 feet per mile, the Kern is one of the steepest and wildest whitewater rides in North America. The Lower Kern runs 32 miles from Isabella Dam to the canyon mouth above Bakersfield.

The first 19 miles of the Lower Kern provide thrilling rapids for river runners each summer. At normal flows, BLM launch sites to Sandy Flat is mostly class II water, with a few short class III rapids. Sandy Flat to Democrat Beach is class III and IV rapids with class II sections interspersed. One class V+ rapid, Royal Flush, is found in this section where boaters must portage using the developed trail on the right bank. Below Democrat you'll find numerous class V+ rapids, with a short area of class II and III near Richbar.

Launch Sites: The Lower Kern has four designated launch sites: BLM South near Lake Isabella Main Dam, BLM North at Keyesville Bridge, Sandy Flat and Miracle Hot Springs. Democrat is the designated raft take-out site. There are no designated sites below Democrat.

Season & Waterflow: During a normal water year, the boating season usually runs from May to September. Water flows are dependent upon releases from Lake Isabella Dam. Normal flows range from 800 to 3000 cubic feet per second (cfs). After Labor Day, flows may drop below 800 cfs.

River Use Permits: An annual Kern River Use Permit, good through April 30 of the following year, is required year round. Permits are issued on a first-come, first-serve basis and are free of charge. A permit is required for each craft and must be carried at all times on the river. To obtain a permit, fill out an application in person at a Forest Service office in Lake Isabella or Kernville. Permits may not be applied for, mailed out or left in office drop off boxes.

River Use Manifest: Each day, a completed manifest must be left at the launch site for the specific river run prior to your trip. Manifests are available at each Forest Service office and at the launch sites. The maximum party size for the Lower Kern is 15 people. More than one permit number may appear on a manifest as long as the number of passengers does not exceed the 15 person limit.

Recommended Safety Equipment: A Coast Guard approved personal flotation device must be readily accessible, properly fit, and in good condition, for each member of the party. Each raft should have an extra oar or paddle, a 50 foot throwline with bag and a 16 foot mooring line.

Trip Tips: Plan ahead, as parking is limited at put-in and take-out sites. Scout rapids before running to check for hazards. Experienced rafting skills are a must. Overhanging brush and trees can present special hazards for boaters. Poison oak can also be identified at a glance by its triple leaf pattern. Rattlesnakes are found along the Kern River, so watch your step!

For More Information:

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